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Key words: hybrid regime, informal institutions, clientelism, democratization, parties, factionalism.

Almost two decades after the unmaking of the Soviet Empire, its successor states seem to fall into three distinct categories. First, there are the "good reformers." These are fully consolidated liberal democracies that meet the most ambitious democratic requirements. They are integrated into Western economic and security institutions, most notably NATO and the EU. Admittedly, the list of "good reformers" is short: Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

Then there are the bad reformers. These are nondemocratic regimes, some of them even outright authoritarian. The judiciary and the legislature are under

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the control of a dominant executive, political and civil rights are limited, the media is tightly controlled, and civil society is weak and vulnerable. Political power is concentrated in the hands a few powerful patronage networks, which control the political process by a mix of clientelism, corruption, and repression. The champions of this cohort are Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, followed by Kazakhstan. But not only the Central Asian successor states belong to this group: Belarus, under the autocratic presidency of Aleksandr Lukashenko, is also part of this cohort, and Russia may soon be a member, too.

Finally, there are those in the middle. They are not as authoritarian or politically closed as Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, but they are certainly not liberal democracies like the Baltic states. There is diversity in this middle group: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia are closer to the "good reformers," whereas Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and, increasingly, Russia are closer to the "bad reformers." It is noteworthy that all of these countries (with the exception of Russia, which is becoming steadily less democratic) seem to be locked in limbo. They have meandered back and forth, but always within a small corridor of about one point on the Freedom House Nations in Transit Democracy score. In sum, they seem to be rather stable and consolidated hybrid regimes (see table 1 below).

The notion of a stable hybrid regime may at first sound like an oxymoron, and the many political crises that have surfaced in the Caucasus—the shooting in the parliament in Armenia in 1999, the so-called Georgian Rose Revolution in 2003, and the contested presidential elections in Georgia and Armenia in

Table 1. Freedom House Nations in Transit Democracy Score, 2007

Country	NIT Democracy Score
Estonia	1.96
Latvia	2.07
Lithuania	2.29
Ukraine	4.25
Georgia	4.68
Moldova	4.96
Armenia	5.21
Kyrgyzstan	5.68
Russian Federation	5.86
Tajikistan	5.96
Azerbaijan	6.00
Kazakhstan	6.39
Belarus	6.68
Uzbekistan	6.82
Turkmenistan	6.96

Note: Freedom House scores range from 1 (most democratic) to 7 (least democratic).

2008 that were either a response to (in Georgia) or led to (in Armenia) mass protests and a state of emergency certainly do not seem to imply political stability. Nevertheless, these regimes have retained their underlying structures and institutions and have therefore stabilized their political characteristics, despite these upheavals. It may very well be that these recurring instances of political crisis are a distinct symptom of hybrid regimes, rather than a sign of imminent change, as many well-meaning observers tend to believe.

During the last decade or so, there have been many important advances in the study of political regimes. To start with, it is by now widely accepted that hybrid regimes—those which are neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian—are an important class of political regimes that deserve academic attention. Diamond finds that 39 percent of all political regimes are "hybrid" in the sense that they are neither liberal democracies nor politically closed authoritarian regimes (more on his classification below).[1] Freedom House 2007 classified fifty-eight countries of 193 as partly free, a category that denotes regimes that combine authoritarian and democratic features. Using Polity IV data, the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) counts in 2006 seventy-seven democratic countries, thirty-four autocracies, and forty-nine anocracies, which is another widely used term for in-between regimes.[2]

Many scholars have recently pointed to the fact that these hybrid regimes should not be treated as incomplete or transitional forms of democracy. Many such regimes, particularly in Africa and in the former Soviet Union, have stayed hybrid for a long time[3] and have proved to be rather immune to change. Apparently, they can "form stable links to their economic and societal environment and are often seen by considerable parts of the elites and the population as an adequate institutional solution to the specific problems of governing 'effectively.' As long as this equilibrium between problems, context and power lasts, defective democracies will survive for protracted periods of time," Merkel observes.[4] If this is true, then the empirical study of hybrid regimes should focus particularly on their "survival condition." If one wants to know why hybrid regimes can be so endurable, one needs to investigate the problems to which such regimes offer the solution.

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[1] Larry Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes: Elections without Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 26.

[2] Joseph J. Hewitt, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Ted R. Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2008: Executive Summary* (College Park, MD: CIDCM Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2008).

[3] Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65. Also see Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5-21.

[4] Wolfgang Merkel, "Embedded and Defective Democracies," *Democratization* 11, no. 5 (2004): 35.

With the hybrid regime becoming an important subfield in the study of political regimes, there has also been much effort at developing more accurate classifications that go beyond the old dichotomy of democratic and authoritarian. At first, this led to what Levitsky and Collier, in 1997, referred to as "democracy with adjectives."[5] New qualifiers for democracy (authoritarian, neopatrimonial, pseudo-, proto-, delegated, defective, and so on) mushroomed, all highlighting one important aspect of the regime under scrutiny. Later attempts were made to categorize these subtypes into broader classification schemes. For example, Diamond proposes a useful classification scheme[6] that lists six categories of regime types, ranging from liberal democracies to politically closed authoritarian systems.[7]

This essay is concerned with two related questions: What are the origins of the hybrid regimes in the Caucasus, and what makes them persistent and consolidated? In what follows, we start by describing the state of democracy in the three states of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. First, we focus on the features of the political regime that place these regimes in the category of hybrids (albeit borderline hybrid-authoritarian in the case of Azerbaijan). Next, we trace the origins of these hybrid regimes by considering their specific trajectories in the three countries since the collapse of the Soviet Union. A

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[5] David Collier and Steven Levitsky, Research Note, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 430-451.

[6] Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes: Elections without Democracy," 21-35.

[7] The first two categories are liberal democracy and electoral democracy. Both denote democratic regimes. But liberal democracies are fully democratic (with a Freedom House Democracy score of 2 and better). They meet the (Schumpeterian) minimalist requirements of democracy in the sense that the principal positions of power are filled through competitive struggle for the popular vote, but they must also meet more demanding requirements. Particularly, they must guarantee the freedoms (freedom of organization, expression, and information) that make elections meaningful. Electoral democracies meet only the minimalist requirements, but lack the broad civil liberties and the deep institutional embedding of democratic practices in liberal democracies. The next three categories are reserved for nondemocratic regimes: competitive authoritarian regimes, hegemonic electoral authoritarian regimes, and politically closed authoritarian regimes. In competitive authoritarian regimes, formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising authority, but the regime does not meet minimal democratic requirements. Elections are neither fair nor free, but, nevertheless, they may be bitterly fought; there may be a parliamentarian opposition, or even a few independent media outlets (see also Levitsky and Way, "Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." Hegemonic electoral authoritarian regimes show much less competition in election, rarely face contestation by a parliamentary opposition, place media under central control, and ensure that the judiciary is dependent on the executive. Finally, politically closed authoritarian regimes face no contestation, and competition is virtually absent. The sixth and last category lumps together ambiguous regimes which are somewhere between electoral democracies and competitive authoritarian regimes. They fall on the blurry boundary between electoral democracy and competitive authoritarianism and may meander back and forth, making it difficult for independent observers to agree over how to classify them. Applying this scheme, Diamond classifies Georgia and Armenia as ambiguous regimes and Azerbaijan as hegemonic electoral authoritarian.

comparison with the Baltic states (the "good" reformers) is used in order to highlight some of the factors that led to the emergence of hybrids in the Caucasus. The third section focuses on what we call the second round of state-building. After the turmoil of the immediate post-Soviet transition and the subsequent civil wars (1988-1993) came to an end, the ruling elites had to reconstruct central authority within their polities. We show that the emergence of hybrid regimes to a large extent is the immediate consequence of the strategies that the new rulers chose in order to secure their authority. In the fourth section, we speculate on why these regimes are protracted and stable. In this section, we also discuss the so-called Rose Revolution in Georgia—an instance of massive contestation that led to the replacement of the political elite, without changing the underlying structures. We conclude this essay with a brief discussion on the lessons that the study of the Caucasian hybrids hold for the wider study of democratization.

Hybrids in the Caucasus

Georgia and Armenia can be described as true hybrid regimes, while Azerbaijan is basically an authoritarian regime, with some elements of democracy. All three cases have maintained more or less the same levels of democracy over the last ten years, although there has been a slow slide toward the authoritarian end of the spectrum in all cases. Table 2 shows the Freedom House Nations in Transit scores for all three republics from 1999 to 2007:

Table 2. Freedom House Nations in Transit Democracy Scores, 1999-2007

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Armenia	4.79	–	4.83	4.83	4.92	5.00	5.18	5.14	5.21
Azerbaijan	5.58	–	5.63	5.54	5.46	5.63	5.86	5.93	6.00
Georgia	4.17	–	4.33	4.58	4.83	4.83	4.96	4.86	4.68

The defining features of the three regimes are the following: First, in all cases, there is a powerful executive, led by the president, which in many ways seems to have taken over the functions of the Soviet-era Communist Party. The presidency (i.e., the president, his administration, and the various informal networks that link him to individual officials) fulfils many of the functions that the all-powerful Central Committee of the Communist Party fulfilled yesteryear.[8] Overall, it is proximity to the president—whether

[8] Jonathan Wheatley, "Georgia's Democratic Stalemate," openDemocracy.net, April 14, 2008, http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/democracy_power/caucasus_fractures/georgia_democratic_stalemate.

formally through membership in the presidential administration, or informally through close personal connections—that determines the political influence of an individual bureaucrat. The presidential networks (again both formal and informal) have more influence than either parliament or even the cabinet of ministers, undermining any checks and balances that can be brought to bear on the executive.

After the passage of the Constitution in 1995, the presidency in Georgia was reestablished and power henceforth rested primarily with the State Chancellery (presidential administration). The State Chancellery, although it had little power on paper, in many ways resembled the old Central Committee; its departments, and even the individuals who manned them, were very much a reproduction of the old Communist Party bureaucracy.[9] After the Rose Revolution, the State Chancellery was disbanded and two separate organizations were created: a presidential administration and a cabinet office (effectively the administration of the prime minister). However, real power rested with President Saakashvili's close networks, composed of individuals whose influence did not so much derive from their official positions, as from the close connections they developed with Saakashvili as a result of their work in the NGO sector during the Shevardnadze period. In Azerbaijan, the presidential administration is also dominant and is headed by the former secretary for ideology in the Azerbaijan Communist Party, Ramiz Mehtiev. The informal networks extending from the president and the presidential administration control all economic life (formal and informal), including the vital oil sector.[10] In Armenia, it is not so much the formal presidential administration that dominates but the networks that radiate from the current and former presidents, Serzh Sarkisian and Robert Kocharian.

Second, political parties in the Caucasian states are a feature of the political elite alone and are largely irrelevant to society. In all three cases, at various points in time, a relatively formalized "party of power" has been established that mirrors the old Communist Party to the extent that it is the dominant party that represents the authorities and is a means whereby state employees, businessmen, and intellectuals can join the main networks of power. At the same time, it fails to penetrate society in the way that the Communist Party used to. Azerbaijan's ruling party, Yeni Azerbaijan (New Azerbaijan), founded

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[9] One of the most powerful posts within the State Chancellery was that of secretary of the Security Council, which oversaw all matters of defense and security. The post was held by Nugzar Sajaia from the council's inception in 1996 until his suicide on February 25, 2002. Sajaia had previously held equivalent posts in Communist Party structures; he had been head of the department of administrative structures and later head of the department of organizational party work in the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party.

[10] International Crisis Group, "Azerbaijan: Turning Over a New Leaf?" *International Crisis Group Europe Report 15*, May 13, 2004, http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/ index.cfm? id=2752&l=1.

in 1992 by Heydar Aliyev, has been the dominant force in the country since Aliyev took power in June 1993, and has controlled Azerbaijan's parliament since the 1995 parliamentary elections. In Georgia, two ruling parties have governed in succession: the first was the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG), founded in 1993 by Eduard Shevardnadze and Zurab Zhvania, which won a parliamentary majority in both the 1995 and 1999 parliamentary elections, while the second was the United National Movement, formed through a union of Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement and Zurab Zhvania's United Democrats in November 2004. Finally, in Armenia, the Armenian National Movement (ANM) constituted a ruling party under the leadership of Levon Ter Petrosian and dominated political life in Armenia from 1991 until 1998. Following Ter Petrosian's ouster, Robert Kocharian's new Karabakh elite (see below) has been represented by the Republican Party, although it has shared power with a number of smaller factions, most notably the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, or Dashnaks). It is not ideology that defines the "party of power," but proximity to the authorities. The rapid collapses of the ANM following Ter Petrosian's ouster, and of the CUG following Shevardnadze's resignation as chairman of the party in September 2001, demonstrate that a "party of power" cannot survive without the patronage of the president.

Similarly, opposition parties are poorly institutionalized, mainly nonideological and charisma-based, and highly dependent on their leaders. They have little if any organized grass-roots support. Typically, they are established—often as parliamentary factions—by former members of the political elite after an acrimonious break with the president and his entourage. This was the case with Saakashvili's National Movement, established at the end of 2001, shortly after Saakashvili's break with Shevardnadze and his resignation as justice minister. Similarly, one of Azerbaijan's main opposition parties, Musavat, is led by Isa Gambar, who had been chairman of parliament during Abulfaz Elchibey's short-lived government from 1992 to 1993. In Armenia, Orinats Yerkir was one of the main opposition parties contesting the May 2007 parliamentary elections; its leader is Artur Bagdasaryan, the former speaker of the National Assembly and former loyalist of President Robert Kocharian. Another main opposition party is the Heritage Party, led by former minister of foreign affairs, Raffi Hovanissian.

Few parties, whether progovernment or opposition, have either a distinct ideological platform or a clear constituency of supporters within society. Most parties are ephemeral and their fate depends on the (often short) political lives of their leaders. Voters, therefore, vote either for "the authorities" or for a particular opposition leader whom they like, without any clear idea of what in terms of policies they are voting for—a state of affairs that is hardly conducive to a participatory democracy.

Third, elections are held not to provide voters with a real choice of policy alternatives from which to choose, but instead to confer a stamp of legitimacy

on the incumbent regime. It is noteworthy that the only elections to result in a turnover of power in the newly independent states of the Caucasus were the first-ever truly competitive elections to be held, and even then this occurred only in Armenia (parliamentary elections on May 20, 1990) and in Georgia (parliamentary elections on October 28, 1990)—resulting in the defeat of the incumbent Communist Party. In Georgia, the new leadership remained in power only for a little more than a year before being overthrown, and former Communist Party first secretary Eduard Shevardnadze returned to power as a result. In Azerbaijan, Ayaz Mutalibov was overthrown by forces loyal to the opposition Azerbaijani Popular Front in 1992, but not through elections. All subsequent changeovers of power have not come about through elections either: in Armenia, Robert Kocharian replaced Levon Ter Petrosian in 1998 after a "palace coup"; in Azerbaijan, Popular Front leader Abulfaz Elchibey was forced out in 1993, after just a year in power, by an armed insurrection and replaced as president by Heidar Aliyev, and later—in 2003—Ilham Aliyev replaced his father Heidar as a result of the latter's ill health and subsequent death; in Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili replaced Eduard Shevardnadze in April 2003 after a popular uprising or "revolution." An election "anointed" the replacement of Robert Kocharian as president by Serzh Sarkisian in 2008, but Sarkisian was the hand-picked successor of Kocharian and no true rotation of power took place. Elections have therefore played little role in determining who rules in the post-communist countries of the Caucasus.

Typically, elections are a means by which the authorities can, in the words of Andrew Wilson, "fake democracy."[11] During elections, the ruling party and the incumbent political elite are able to draw on the financial resources of the state—both formal and informal—in order to ensure victory for the party in parliamentary elections and for their patron—the president—in presidential elections. Victory is gained by a variety of means, ranging from more or less legitimate campaigning, supported in most cases by largely favorable media coverage, to the use of "soft" administrative resources, such as providing electricity, fuel, and other public goods shortly before elections, to the sponsoring of "false opposition parties" to capture the votes of discontents, and even to outright falsification and fraud. All Caucasian countries have used a mixture of all these "technologies" to win elections, although they differ in the ratio of technologies used. It is difficult to "grade" elections in terms of how free and fair they are; nevertheless, some attempt can be made to do so by referring to election monitoring reports from the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), most of which provide the proportion of polling stations visited, in which (a) the voting procedure, and (b) the vote

[11] Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

Table 3. OSCE Election Observations: Evaluation of Voting and Counting Procedures

Country	Election	Date	Polling Station: Poor/Very Poor %	Count: Poor/Very Poor %
Georgia	Parliamentary	05/21/08	8	22
Georgia	Presidential	01/05/08	7	23
Georgia	Parliamentary	03/28/04	4	15
Georgia	Presidential	01/04/04	3	13
Georgia	Parliamentary	11/02/03	19	31
Georgia	Presidential	04/09/00	16	48
Georgia	Parliamentary	10/31/99	21	24
Armenia	Presidential	02/19/08	5	16
Armenia	Parliamentary	05/12/07	6	34[1]
Armenia	Presidential	05/25/03	10[2]	33[2]
Armenia	Parliamentary	02/19/03	11[2]	n/a
Armenia	Presidential	05/30/99	10	22
Armenia	Parliamentary	03/16/98[3]	14	31
Azerbaijan	Presidential	11/06/05	13	41
Azerbaijan	Parliamentary	10/15/03	26	55[2]
Azerbaijan	Presidential	11/05/00	24	52

Notes: 1. No data available for the count itself; this figure refers to the tabulation of results.
2. For these observations, the standard categories "Very Good," "Good, "Poor," and "Very Poor" were replaced by the categories "No problems," "Minor problems," "A few significant problems," and "Many significant problems."
3. In each case, there were two rounds of elections as no candidates won 50 percent in the first round. Figures given are the averages of the two rounds.

count, is graded either as "poor" or "very poor." Table 3 shows the proportion of polling stations falling into these categories in sixteen elections in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

Table 3 provides an idea of the cruder forms of election manipulation, namely disruption of voting procedures and falsification of the vote count. These cruder forms of vote rigging occurred in all Caucasian countries, although they were significantly more predominant in Azerbaijan. The lack of an institutionalized party system in the Caucasian republics makes elections a zero-sum game and therefore prone to manipulation and abuse. Neither "parties of power" nor defeated presidents will survive a period of opposition and the bureaucrats who manage elections at the local level depend on the president and the ruling party for their positions. There is therefore a very strong incentive for these bureaucrats to "deliver the correct result." Given the prevalence of graft and clientelism in government (see below), defeated power-holders even risk prosecution for corruption or misuse of power (as

occurred with some of Shevardnadze's acolytes in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution), further discouraging them from countenancing electoral defeat.

Fourth, social organizations—or what is commonly known as civil society—play little role in determining the evolution of the political regime. It is true that at certain critical junctures—the Rose Revolution being a prime example—society appears to mobilize; however, it is unable to do so autonomously. NGOs make up most of what is referred to as civil society, and these are either dependent on Western funding or (in the case of government-affiliated NGOs or GONGOs) rely on government patronage. The NGO sector has been strong in Georgia, where a few NGOs with close links to Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement (the most prominent of which was the Liberty Institute), were instrumental in mobilizing protestors in the Rose Revolution of 2003. NGOs are probably weakest in Azerbaijan, where those with an agenda that may loosely be described as political face strong pressure from the authorities. While NGOs have been allowed to develop relatively freely in Georgia and Armenia, they have tended to represent only an elitist pro-Western fringe of society and have little to do with ordinary citizens. Broad-based sectoral organizations, such as trade unions, remain weak in all three cases. In none of the three cases has civil society effectively played the role of organized intermediary between society and the state.

The media, too, by and large, has been unable to bring the executive to account. Although a plethora of independent newspapers exists in all three countries, many with pro-opposition viewpoints (although these frequently face censure in Azerbaijan), journalistic standards are low and investigative journalism is virtually nonexistent. Television—both public and private—has typically been under the direct or indirect control of the authorities. An exception is Georgia, where a major private media holding—Rustavi 2—sided with Mikheil Saakashvili's opposition National Movement against President Shevardnadze in the run-up to the 2003 parliamentary elections and during the Rose Revolution. Rustavi 2's role is believed to have been crucial to the success of the Rose Revolution.[12] Similarly, by 2007, another private television station, Imedi, had become the focus of opposition to Mikheil Saakashvili.[13] In Armenia, A1 Plus, the most influential opposition-leaning independent TV station and a kind of Armenian equivalent of Rustavi-2, had its frequency

[12] Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005).

[13] However, following the nine-day state of emergency in Georgia in November 2007, during which much of Imedi's equipment was smashed, and the subsequent death of the company's owner, Badri Patarkatsishvili, in February 2008, Imedi entered a period of deep crisis, and, at the time of writing, was not broadcasting either news or political analysis. The small Kavkasia television channel was left alone to represent the opposition, although it is unable to broadcast outside Georgia's capital, Tbilisi.

assigned to another channel and went off the air in April 2002 as a result of pressure from the authorities. Azerbaijan similarly lacks any pro-opposition or even independent television channel.

Finally, and this is a factor that applies to Georgia and Armenia far more than it applies to Azerbaijan, the political elite is factionalized within itself and it is this, not the party system, that is the defining feature of pluralism in these two countries. In Georgia, Shevardnadze's political elite was divided among: (1) an economic elite, made up of well-connected businessmen and financiers, many of whom had links with the president's family; (2) leftovers from the Soviet regime, made up of former colleagues from Komsomol or higher Communist Party structures; and (3) a younger generation of mainly Western-educated lawyers and scholars with close links to some of Georgia's more powerful NGOs. After the Rose Revolution, this pluralism was less overt but still remained, with simmering conflicts among the so-called Liberty Institute group (former activists of one such NGO), former colleagues of the late Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, and a small circle of associates close to the parliamentary speaker, Nino Burjanadze. In Armenia, it was a schism with the Yerkrapah Union of war veterans, founded by Defense Minister Sarkisian and made up of men who had participated in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, that led to the removal of President Levon Ter Petrosian in 1998. Other "competing teams" were said to exist, including those clustered around Ter Petrosian himself, his brother Telman, Minister of the Interior Vano Siradeghian, and Defense Minister Vazgen Sarkisian.[14] Subsequently, a new schism developed between Yerkrapah and the Karabakh elite of the new president, Robert Kocharian, and his defense minister, Serzh Sarkisian, resulting in the gradual marginalization of the former. Factionalism also exists in Azerbaijan, with two "regional strategic groups" having been identified within the political elite—one that has become associated with Azerbaijanis whose families were resettled to Azerbaijan from Armenia during the Soviet period and earlier in the twentieth century (known as the Yeraz or "Ermenistanis"), and another made up of individuals native to the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan (the Nakhichevanis).[15] However, these two factions seem to have been deliberately nurtured by President Heidar Aliyev to ensure his own continued dominance through the principle of divide-and-rule, and it is questionable whether they can be compared with the relatively autonomous elite factions in Armenia and Georgia.

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[14] Nora Dudwick, "Political Transformations in Postcommunist Armenia," in *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus,* ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[15] International Crisis Group, "Azerbaijan: Turning Over a New Leaf?" *International Crisis Group Europe Report 156*, May 13, 2004, http://www.crisisgroup.org/ home/ index.cfm?id=2752&l=1.

In most cases, the factionalism that is inherent within the political elite is not reflected in the party system. In Georgia from 1994 to 2001 and 2004 to the present day, in Armenia under Ter Petrosian, and in Azerbaijan since Heidar Aliyev's return in 1993, the various factions have been held together within the structure of the ruling party and by the presidential administration. In Armenia under Robert Kocharian, certain factions have had their own political parties, although these parties have remained mostly loyal to the dominant Republican Party.[16]

The factionalism described above does not refer to the sort of institutional divides that can provide the checks and balances that are necessary for any democracy, for example, a conflict between the legislature and the executive or between the judiciary and other branches of power. Members of the ruling party faction in the legislature simply follow the instructions of the leadership of the faction in parliament or those of the president. If the leadership fragments, individual members of parliament follow the lead of their "patrons"; thus, when the CUG collapsed in Georgia, MPs from that faction either joined pro-Shevardnadze factions, or those of Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Zhvania. Similarly, in Armenia, when Ter Petrosian was facing opposition from Yerkrapah in 1997-1998, MPs from the Armenian National Movement merely shifted their allegiances from Ter Petrosian to Kocharian. The judiciary also has been very weak as an independent counterbalance to executive power; it lacks organizational autonomy and courts tend to follow the old tradition of the Peoples' Courts of the Soviet period and all too often succumb to pressure from the presidency or the Prosecutor's Office. In particular, the Councils of Justice in Georgia and Armenia, which play a supervisory and disciplinary role over the judiciary, have been highly dependent on the president; in Georgia, the president chaired the council, while in Armenia, he appointed all its members, although in both cases constitutional changes passed in June 2005 have weakened this dependency somewhat. Similarly, in Azerbaijan, the Judicial-Legal Council (equivalent to the Council of Justice) includes a representative of the Prosecutor's Office, and, in Georgia, the Prosecutor General was a member of the Council of Justice until June 2006. In all of these countries, therefore, the judiciary has been a part of the presidential vertical hierarchical power structure and has been unable to effectively ensure that the executive follows the rule of law.

To summarize, within the regimes in place in the three Caucasian republics, political change is born not through pressure from the citizenry, as in a democracy, but out of intra-elite power struggles. This even applies to

[16] An exception here is the Orinats Yerkir Party, which was loyal to the authorities during the 2003 parliamentary elections but subsequently split and competed as an opposition party in the 2007 election.

Georgia during the Rose Revolution, when the cleavage within the political elite was the primary factor behind the changes, while mass mobilization was used merely as a resource by the most successful of the factions. In all three cases, a ruling elite (or oligarchy) holds power and does all it can to retain it, while at the same time observing some minimal democratic procedures. The oligarchy, despite enjoying a monopoly of power, is subject to opposition, especially in Georgia and Armenia, both from within its own ranks (through factionalization) and from some form of legalized opposition movement(s). However, the formal democratic procedures that do exist in these regimes (such as voting) have no real influence; it is only struggles among elites that can change the distribution of political power.

The Making of the Hybrids I: 1989-1993

The early days of democratic transition in the Caucasus were marked by three factors that set these transitions apart from other cases of political transitions: (1) the struggle for (domestic) liberalization was subordinated to the overriding demand for (external) liberation from Soviet rule; (2) the demise of the Soviet Union led to a total devaluation all state capacities, affecting every aspect of societal and political life; and, finally, (3) on top of state weakness came civil wars that affected all three countries. Before we move on to describe at greater length the individual trajectories of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, let us briefly elaborate on these three factors.

First, the process of democratization was intrinsically linked to the quest for national liberation, and both went hand-in-hand with unprecedented ethno-nationalist mobilization. By 1989, challenges to the incumbent communist regime had proliferated all over the Soviet Empire. The Baltic republics took the lead, but nationalist mobilization soon spilled over to other republics of the USSR. On February 22, 1988, thirty thousand demonstrators rallied on Theater Square in Yerevan, Armenia. Three days later, on February 25, there were around one million demonstrators—about a quarter of the total population. In Georgia, the nationalist opposition mobilized up to 200,000 demonstrators by November 1988, and by January 1990 in Azerbaijan, there were at least a quarter of a million demonstrators on Lenin Square in central Baku. Much of the political energy that was set free by the mass movements was directed against what was perceived by many as foreign Soviet domination. Surfing on the wave of nationalist mobilization, oppositional elites in Armenia and Georgia won the first free elections in 1990 and took over the state; in Azerbaijan, the old communist regime hung onto power only because it manipulated the elections, but it eventually collapsed in 1992 under intense pressure from the nationalist opposition. It was ethnic nationalism focused on liberation from external domination that provided a mass base for the democratizing

movements, voiced the strongest demands for liberalization, and shaped post-Soviet civic life.[17]

Second, and perhaps most importantly, the transition to democracy took place in an environment which was marked by a near complete devaluation of state capacities. The collapse of the Soviet Empire was not only the collapse of a regime but also it was the unmaking of the whole institutional framework that had held the empire together. The successor states of the Soviet Union suffered a double state weakness: the weakness of the moribund Soviet state was paralleled by the incapacity of the new, emerging independent states. The disruptive regime transitions had paralyzed Soviet (central) state institutions, while the young successor states of the Soviet Union were not yet capable of effectively carrying out key state functions. Many accounts of the unmaking of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the successor states focus predominantly on the processes of liberalization and democratization that spilled over from the center to the republics, eventually enabling the "national revolutions" in Georgia, Armenia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan, and Russia, but they tend to underrate the impact of the sudden loss in state capacities that all successor polities experienced. Imagine a state that has no army and no defense ministry, no internal security forces, no working communication lines, and no tax revenues. Moreover, in this state, intense competition between incumbent and challenging elites rages over the future of the state and especially over the crafting of its political institutions. Further, the population is highly mobilized and carries politics onto the streets and into the squares of the capital. This, in a nutshell, is how the successor states of the Soviet Union looked between 1989 and 1992.

Finally, the tide of nationalist mobilization and the devaluation of state capacity led to another peculiarity that sets the Caucasian cases apart from other post-Soviet cases (with the exception of Tajikistan, Moldova, and Chechnya). All three Caucasian republics spiralled into ethno-political violence.[18] From 1988 to 1994, a war was fought between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over the mainly ethnic Armenian territory of Nagorny Karabakh, which was an autonomous territory within the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. The demand of the Karabakh Armenians to be annexed to the neighboring Soviet Republic of Armenia led to a forced exchange of population and then to a bitter war between the Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijan. At least twenty thousand soldiers and civilians were killed, and hundreds of thousands, mainly Azerbajianis from

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[17] Mark Beissinger, "Ethnic Identity and Democratization: Lessons from the Post-Soviet Region," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 2 (2007): 73-99. Also see Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[18] Christoph Zürcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Post-Soviet Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

Karabakh, were internally displaced (which, in this case, is a euphemism for being ethnically cleansed). In Georgia, a series of three interrelated wars took place between 1989 and 1993. The first war was over the breakaway region of South Ossetia (1991-1992); the second war was fought between rival Georgian groups bidding for political power and was triggered by the violent overthrow of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia by a coalition of opposition politicians and warlords (end of 1991 to 1993); while the third was over the breakaway Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia (1992-1993). The conflicts over South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain formally unresolved to the present day. In both cases, the secessionist entities have asserted themselves militarily, but have failed to gain international recognition.

Why did the Caucasian republics spiral into war and emerge as hybrid regimes? And why, by contrast, did the Baltic states avoid violence and become liberal democracies? What made their transition so different and so successful?

Interestingly, the usual suspect—ethnicity—is not the culprit. Neither the salience of ethnic identity nor ethnic demography can explain the different outcomes. In the Baltic states, ethnic identity was no weaker than in Armenia and Georgia, and arguably stronger than in Azerbaijan. Attendance at demonstrations against Soviet "occupation" equalled or exceeded that in the Caucasian states. Neither can ethnic demography account for the differences. Estonia and Latvia both had significant minorities (38 percent and 48 percent, respectively), while Lithuania had a relatively small minority population (20 percent). Georgia's minority population accounted for 30 percent of the overall population, whereas Azerbaijan (18 percent) and Armenia (7 percent) were ethnically very homogeneous.[19] On average, therefore, the percentage of ethnic minorities in the Baltic states exceeded that in the Caucasus. Against the backdrop of this ethnic demographic data, one has to agree with Beissinger[20] in concluding that ethnic diversity is a weak explanation of democratic development on its own. Rather, ethnicity exercises its effects on processes of transition in interaction with other factors.

National mobilization in the Baltics was as strong as that in the Caucasus, no less anti-Soviet, and realized earlier. But in contrast with the Caucasus, nationalist mobilization was promoted by a de facto coalition between the so-called reform communists and the leaders of the broad national movements (or Popular Fronts). Although more radical movements existed, they by and large were marginalized by this coalition, and it was this that enabled the Baltic states to avoid sharp elite cleavages and internal fragmentation. Furthermore, elites

[19] Figures are taken from the 1989 population census of the USSR.

[20] Beissinger, "Ethnic Identity and Democratization. Lessons from the Post-Soviet Region."

and population broadly agreed on the direction and end stage of the transition: Theirs was to be a European state, firmly anchored in the EU and NATO.

By contrast, the Georgian national movement was radicalized, internally fragmented, and unable to engage in any (if only tactical) compromise with the incumbent communist elites. The communist authorities became totally discredited after Soviet forces dispersed a demonstration in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989, leaving nineteen people dead and hundreds injured. As a result, the national opposition became more radicalized and moderate voices were completely sidelined, making it no longer possible to create a Popular Front along Baltic lines.[21] In contrast to the Baltic republics, it was the radical opposition that gained the upper hand in Georgia, not the (relative) moderates.

Furthermore, when in October 1990 the nationalist "Round Table—Free Georgia" bloc, under the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was elected to power, the new regime was bitterly contested in two autonomous territories of Georgia, the autonomous republic of Abkhazia and the autonomous region (oblast, or province) of South Ossetia. Counter-mobilizations by ethnic Georgians, on the one hand, and ethnic Abkhaz and Ossets, on the other, soon spiralled out of control. By the end of 1990, Georgia was falling apart. South Ossetia and Abkhazia were mainly outside Tbilisi's control, the Georgian national movement was deeply divided, and paramilitary "pro-fatherland" groups were operating largely unchecked. On May 26, 1991, Gamsakhurdia was elected president with over 86 percent of the vote. He lasted less than a year in office before being ousted by an unlikely coalition of paramilitary factions, intelligentsia, and Soviet-era nomenklatura in January 1992. The new leadership, dominated by warlords, invited former Georgian Communist Party boss Eduard Shevardnadze back to the country to give the new government a veneer of legitimacy. Before Shevardnadze could wrest full control of the country from the paramilitaries, another devastating war lost Georgia all remaining control over Abkhazia. By the end of 1993, both South Ossetia and Abkhazia remained de facto independent.

Things unfolded differently in Armenia, but with equally unfortunate consequences. In Armenia, the national movement rapidly gained the upper hand over the Soviet nomenklatura. The process of mobilization was almost exclusively inspired by the quest for unification of Karabakh with Armenia. The Karabakh issue had an immense mobilizing force, but also a unifying effect. In Armenia, the struggle for power was hardly ever confrontational. As in the Baltic republics, nationalist challengers gradually took over the Soviet institutions and "nationalized" them, while the old elites, after a slight

[21] Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union*, 45.

hesitation, adopted the positions of the opposition. The Armenian "revolution" was—internally—a peaceful one.[22] On the most important (and soon the only) political question, that of Karabakh, there were no strategic differences between incumbents and challengers. In the first free elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Armenia, which took place in the summer of 1990, the Armenian National Movement won a majority of seats, and Levon Ter Petrossian was elected chairman of the parliament in July. But the national movement had taken over a country that was at war. Since February 1988, a low-intensity war had been fought in Karabakh, which escalated into a full-blown international war as the Soviet Union broke up.

The issue of Karabakh also shaped the transition in Azerbaijan. But in contrast to Armenia, "Karabakh" never became a factor that would bridge the rifts between the communist regime and the nationalist opposition. Quite to the opposite: Karabakh became a political playing field, on which regime and opposition tried to score points off each other. Unlike both Georgia and Armenia, the well-entrenched communist regime in Azerbaijan resisted the nationalist movement and remained in power until 1992. The sharp cleavages between incumbent and oppositional elites hindered an efficient execution of the war in Karabakh and led to a serious military defeat in the town of Lachin, allowing the Armenian side to establish a corridor between Karabakh and Armenia. It was defeat on the battle field that eventually brought down the communist regime. In May 1992, Ayaz Mutalibov was finally overthrown by the Popular Front in a bloodless, and to a large extent peaceful, coup, and the leader of the Popular Front, Abulfez Elchibey, was elected president. But when in early 1993 Armenian forces defeated Azerbaijani forces in the northern part of Karabakh, the president was faced with an imminent coup against him. He turned for help to the gray eminence of Azerbaijani politics, Heydar Aliyev, former member of the Politburo and long-time first secretary of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party. Aliyev initially allowed himself to be co-opted as the fifty-first member of the fifty-member-strong parliament, and was then elected chairman. He organized a plebiscite against Elchibey, which ended with a clear vote of no-confidence in the president. Aliyev won the following presidential elections with a solid Soviet result of 98.8 percent, on a voter turnout of 90 percent. Thus began the Aliyev era, which brought Azerbaijan a stable, yet undemocratic regime.

It is time to briefly sum up the Caucasian misadventures, as compared to the Baltic states. What derailed a peaceful transition in Georgia (which might have cleared the way for the establishment of a liberal democracy) was neither ethnic demography per se, nor the ethno-national character of the national

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[22] Gerard J. Libaridian, *The Challenge of Statehood: Armenian Political Thinking since Independence* (Watertown, MA: Blue Crane Books, 1999), 20.

movement. Rather, it was the fact that the challenging nationalist elites were radicalized (and, hence, no pact with reform communists was possible) and highly noncohesive, which prevented regime consolidation. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the new nationalist power-holders in Georgia were challenged by equally staunch nationalist elites in two of Georgia's three autonomous entities. Ethnic mobilization of Georgians, on the one hand, and of Abkhaz and Ossetians, on the other, soon grew into an interdependent process in which each action produced a counter-reaction. Mobilization spiralled out of control and led to civil war.

In Armenia, transition could have gone the Baltic way. There were no unbridgeable rifts between incumbents and challengers, and the national movement was highly cohesive. But whereas in the Baltic states the cohesiveness of the new national elite, the pact between old and new elites, and the widespread popular support for the national project were centered on "Europe," in Armenia, they were centered around "Karabakh." In the Baltic states, integration into Europe could be achieved only by tempering radical nationalism and by aiming for high standards of governance. In Armenia, "Karabakh" soon turned into a bitter war that could be won only by total national mobilization, and by giving a free hand to those who were able to successfully organize a desperate war. As a result, the prospects for establishing a liberal democracy were badly damaged.

Finally, in Azerbaijan, the national movement lacked the power that it had in Georgia, Armenia, and the Baltic. It was strong enough to challenge incumbents, but it was not strong enough to stay in power and consolidate the regime. Its rule lasted for less than a year. In the course of the political struggle between the communist elite and its nationalist challengers between 1989 and 1993, the communist elite applied many unconstitutional means, ranging from manipulation of elections to the creation of unconstitutional political bodies to exercise the use of force. During this process, the institutional base for democratic governance was eroded. When Heidar Aliyev took over in 1993, he was able to start to build the "Aliyev system," which lasts to the present day.

The Making of Hybrids II: Regime Reconstruction after 1993

Between 1989 and 1993, all three Caucasian countries had undergone a profound transformation from Soviet republics to independent and formally democratic states. Yet in many respects, they had to start all over again in 1993, under circumstances which were not conducive to the establishment of genuine democratic practices. All three republics had suffered dramatically from the consequences of the wars, both in terms of horrendous human costs and in terms of the damage that war and civil strife had caused to the nascent political institutions. None of the three states possessed a viable bureaucratic structure, or anything distantly reassembling what Michael Mann would

describe as infrastructural power.[23] The political institutions of the new polities were very weak and vulnerable. Rulers were far from being secure from coups. In fact, elected presidents in Georgia and Azerbaijan (i.e., Gamsakhurdia and Elchibey) had been overthrown. Armenia was in a permanent state of national mobilization. Security concerns dominated the political process, and the country was essentially run by those capable of organizing war, unchecked by democratic control.

Such was the setting when, in 1993, the political elite embarked on state-building, round two. The hybrid regimes that emerged have their origins much more in the postwar situation of 1993 than in the immediate post-Soviet period. As we will argue below, of particular importance was the way in which political elites reconstructed their authority after 1993.

Central state authority had virtually disappeared in Georgia and Azerbaijan. In both countries, an unlikely coalition of politicians and warlord-type militia leaders brought back seasoned Soviet power-brokers in order to prevent a total collapse. In Georgia, it was Eduard Shevardnadze who was called to the rescue. In Azerbaijan, Heidar Aliyev took the helm. Both had in common a long and distinguished career in the most powerful Soviet institutions, having been Communist Party first secretaries of their respective republics. However, they faced an immense challenge. In reestablishing central authority, would they sideline or co-opt the various warlords, regional power-brokers, entrepreneurs of the shadow economy, and leaders of the political opposition?

Given his precariously weak position, Shevardnadze relied heavily on co-optation; he gave state posts to local power-holders who either had the potential to act as "spoilers" or had powerful networks that could be used to bargain, threaten, or cajole potential "spoilers" into not rocking the boat. Second, he sought to reactivate the old networks with which he was familiar—mainly party and Komsomol (the communist youth organization, an important network for future cadres during the Soviet Union). Third, he rehabilitated the old Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), of which the police were the most visible and influential part. As a union-republic ministry (i.e., one that had had some autonomous existence at union-republic level), the MoIA had not been "decapitated" by the collapse of the Soviet state and could therefore be restored relatively easily. Shevardnadze also felt that he could neutralize the paramilitary groups by co-opting low- and middle-ranking members of their number into the police.[24] Finally, he placed Georgia's most important economic assets in the hands of a group of trusted associates, most of whom were close to his own family.

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[23] Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," *Archives Europa Sociologica* 25 (1984): 185-213.

[24] Shevardnadze believed in the police, having himself occupied the post of Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs from 1965 to 1972.

These old networks and reincarnations of Georgia's (Soviet) past were to form the basis of the state administration both in the capital and in the regions. Once he had reestablished the MoIA as an effective instrument of state coercion, defeated the paramilitaries, and established a degree of control over most regions, Shevardnadze's position was far more secure. In November 1995, he was elected president with almost 75 percent of the vote. Only in those geographical regions in which central authority was weak did he still rely on co-optation. For example, in the mainly Armenian-populated region of Javakheti, he ceded power to local Armenian networks that wielded significant economic power through their control over the local oil and gas business.

Although Shevardnadze had made major steps toward consolidating his authority after the chaos of the early 1990s, he was never able to complete this process of consolidation, and retained power by maintaining a delicate balance between various alliances of actors with conflicting aims. These included his own inner circle (mainly members of his family and their allies), who controlled Georgia's largest banks and businesses; a network of former district Communist Party bosses and former Komsomol activists, whom he had put in charge of the regions; and a younger elite, who formed the parliamentary leadership of the newly established "party of power," the Citizens' Union of Georgia, which dominated parliament after the 1995 elections.

In neighboring Azerbaijan, Heidar Aliyev used many of the same tools to secure his position. He relied on his old networks, sidelining challengers where possible, and co-opting them where necessary. However, he was less restrained than Shevardnadze, and, hence, did not need to rely so much on co-option and concessions to his opponents. There were various reasons for this. First, warlord-type militia commanders had acquired strong positions in Georgia and controlled a large part of the state apparatus (such as it was) until 1995. In Azerbaijan, on the other hand, militias were a serious security problem but had not completely suborned the state. Second, ethnic minorities needed to be placated in Georgia, while, in Azerbaijan, the population of ethnic minorities was small and insignificant after the forced exodus of the Armenians. Third, Georgia, far more than Azerbaijan, had its own distinctive *classe politque*, which was known both for its incessant internecine feuding and for its resistance to control by the central authorities. Many members of this class had sharpened their political teeth during the period of nationalist mobilization between 1988 and 1991.

There are two more reasons why Aliyev succeeded much more than Shevardnadze in establishing a centralized and closely-knit patron-client system that was firmly under his own personal control. First, Shevardnadze was a Soviet politician of the Gorbachev mold, who was prepared to countenance at least limited democratization, while Aliyev was very much of the Brezhnev school and was not known for his tolerance of dissent. Second, Aliyev had at his disposal the oil of the Caspian Sea, which could lubricate a centrally administered patron-client mode of governance. By 2006, the oil and

gas sectors made up 53.8 percent of the GDP and oil products made up 92.8 percent of exports.[25] It is safe to say that oil also accounts for the authoritarian rentier state into which Azerbajian transformed itself under Aliyev.

Resource-poor Georgia, on the other hand, relied heavily on foreign aid. Since 1993, Georgia has regularly been among the top beneficiaries of official development assistance. Part of this success is without doubt due to Georgia's remarkable ability to charmingly present herself as, in principle, a very democratic country that is always almost there. Donors reward this self-representation with unconditioned generosity.

Once again, the situation was different in Armenia, but no more conducive to the establishment of a liberal democracy. Central authority was preserved, but it was essentially in the hands of those who had successfully organized a war and won it against all odds: private entrepreneurs of violence, army commanders, and veterans' organizations (such as Yerkrapah, see above). In 1998, one of the leading figures of the Karabakh armed resistance, Robert Kocharian, became president of Armenia. After years of informal domination, this signaled the official takeover of power by the Karabakh clan. Kocharian resigned in 2008. His successor is Serzh Sarkisian, former defense minister of Karabakh and Kocharian's preferred candidate. The elections of both Kocharian and Sarkisian were, according to international observers, marked by irregularities.

This brief analysis of regime reconstruction after 1993 points to some differences among the three Caucasian republics. Each of them followed a distinct trajectory that was shaped by an idiosyncratic confluence of institutional legacies and political events. In Armenia, the army was at the core of the rebuilt central authority; in Georgia and Azerbaijan, experienced and well-connected Soviet power-brokers reconstructed central authority by empowering patron-client networks. In Azerbaijan, a highly centralized patron-client system emerged; in Georgia, the system was more fragmented and less effective.

But on a more general level, the hybrid regimes that have emerged in the Caucasus also share many similarities among themselves and arguably also with many other hybrid regimes around the world. Most importantly, elites in all three countries invested in highly institutionalized yet informal networks of patronage, which became the dominant mode of governance. Beginning in 1993 as the chaos of the civil wars subsided, the first priority of the leadership of the newly independent republics was to ensure their political (and even physical) survival by establishing some degree of regime stability. In order to do so, they established a personalized system of governance and used the administration of the Head of State to reestablish a "chain of command," in

[25] International Monetary Fund, "Republic of Azerbaijan: Statistical Appendix," *IMF Country Report*, no.08/216, July 2008, http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ ft/scr/2008/ cr08216.pdf.

much the same way as the Communist Party leadership had established control during the Soviet period. However, this was not an easy task, given that the trauma of state collapse and civil war had disrupted the balance of power that had prevailed hitherto and had empowered new—and not always particularly civil—actors. Old actors and new therefore fought over what remained of the countries' resources; these actors included former party bosses, directors of Soviet-era enterprises and collective farms, nationalist leaders, regional elites, and (initially) the leaders of official and unofficial militias. Many had the potential to act as spoilers and thwart the attempts of the new leadership to reestablish central authority.

It was against this backdrop that governance through patron-client networks seemed like the only way to reestablish the chain of command. In the early days of its rule, the leadership therefore co-opted potential spoilers by bringing them into a power-sharing arrangement. Later on, it gradually sought to eliminate them, typically by pitting one against the other. Given the virtual nonexistence of a formal economy, almost the only way this could be done was to develop a powerful network of clients with access to the informal economy (typically the smuggling of contraband goods, such as cigarettes, alcohol, petroleum, and even drugs and weapons, across the porous borders of the three states). If one was excluded from these networks, one's potential as a spoiler gradually diminished.

The states that emerged also relied heavily on Soviet-era modes of governance to cement their authority. Both Shevardnadze and Aliyev were former party bosses and drew on their old networks to consolidate their power. In all three cases, the presidency—whether in the formal sense of the presidential administration or informally in terms of the president's networks—came to fulfill very much the same functions as the old Central Committee and became the dominant branch of power. Local administration also came to mirror the former system; despite the establishment of elected local councils, these remained subservient to centrally appointed state administrators, in much the same way as the local soviets had been subservient to the *oblast* (province) or *raion* (district) first secretaries of the Communist Party. Like the reliance on patron-client networks, the readoption of a centralized Soviet-type model of government was the most familiar and available default option for the new leaders.

The Soviet period, therefore, left a profound legacy on state-building in the mid-1990s simply because Soviet-era institutions, networks, and organizational forms were familiar and readily available to the new power-holders. The institutional legacy of Soviet rule manifested itself in the hierarchical structure of the "presidential vertical" and its mechanisms for internal control (see below), while the organizational legacy included formal organizations such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs as well as informal structures such as Communist Party and Komsomol networks.

The states that emerged after 1995 showed the typical symptoms of weak

states: weak formal institutions, high levels of corruption, abundant informality, and limited provision of public goods. But this type of state weakness should not be confused with the weakness that plagued the Caucasian states at the beginning of the 1990s, nor should it be equated with a weakness of the regime. Many of the symptoms that characterize hybrid regimes as seemingly weak states in fact are the product of a strategic decision of elites to apply the power of patronage, when coming to terms with the most pressing needs of the day: reconstructing a minimal degree of central authority and keeping potential challengers at bay.

Democracy is a highly complex system of political rules that is embedded in the societal and economic environment on which it is dependent. In the case of the Caucasus, this wider environment is characterized by the informal mechanisms described above. The type of hybrid democracy that emerged and that became embedded in this environment is thus not an accident, a deviation, or a defect. Rather, it is precisely the type of regime that would not endanger the functionality of its environment.

Locked in Limbo? On Revolution and Stability

As we have noted above, the hybrid regimes in the Caucasus (as in other former Soviet republics such as Moldova and Kyrgyzstan) have remained remarkably stable over the last ten years in terms of the extent (or lack thereof) of democratization and have resisted further steps toward liberal democracy, despite the investment of significant amounts of foreign donor money in democracy-promotion and institutional-reform initiatives. How can this be so?

The stability of the hybrid or hybrid-authoritarian regimes of the southern Caucasus can be ascribed both to the capacity of patrons to ensure the loyalty of their clients within the context of the clientelistic system that defines these regimes and to the so-called "stickiness" of institutions, in particular, the capacity of the informal rules of the game (or the "way things are done") to survive apparently radical upheavals within the regime. Looking at the first of these factors, the loyalty of clients is ensured by an institutionalized system of rewards and punishments. Loyalty is rewarded by what can be described as a "licence to be corrupt" (i.e., to avoid the formal rules and to tap into the lucrative shadow economy). On the other hand, disloyalty is punished, often by selectively and arbitrarily applying the law against the culprit. In the same vein, the old Soviet-era institution whereby superiors kept files of compromising material (*kompromat*) on their subordinates has been restored and reinvigorated. Given that the clientele of the post-Soviet Caucasian state is, by definition, involved in some kind of illegal or corrupt act, power-holders can always find something incriminating to discredit or even prosecute disloyal clients. Within this system, corruption, far from being a sign of regime weakness, is actually an instrument to ensure regime stability, as the state

leadership is able to control its clients and strengthen hierarchical authority.[26]

On occasions, however, top-level members of the governing elite may think themselves well enough protected to defect and to take their own clients with them. This occurred in Georgia, when Eduard Shevardnadze, after successfully maintaining a balance among various elite factions for five years, began from 2000 to rely more and more on his close circle of family and friends and on the various networks of former Communist Party and Komsomol officials whom he had cultivated throughout his long career. The alienation of the younger, more Western-oriented faction, led by parliamentary chairman, Zurab Zhvania, and justice minister, Mikheil Saakashvili, proved to be a fatal mistake. Relying on their close links with the NGO sector and, through them, the financial and human resources of Western aid agencies, this group of "young reformers" found that they could survive without Shevardnadze's patronage, eventually organizing a successful uprising against his regime.

However, even if the governing elite is replaced by new younger blood, as occurred during the Rose Revolution, the old practices or "rules of the game" prove harder to eradicate. According to the public utterances of its leaders, the Rose Revolution aimed to root out corruption and change the way Georgia was governed toward a more Western model of democratic governance. While partly successful in the first of the aims, the new regime had, at the time of writing, completely failed to achieve the second.

In essence, the leadership that came into power during Georgia's Rose Revolution withdrew the "license to be corrupt" from most low- and middle-ranking clients. In return, it rewarded them with an official salary, which, while not over-generous, was more or less enough to live on. We continue to refer to state bureaucrats as "clients" because the old principles of appointing staff to government bodies still remained; the minister would still appoint his "people," who, in turn, would appoint their "people"—friends, relatives, former university colleagues, and the like. When the minister moved, resigned, or was dismissed, his or her "people" would be replaced by those of his/her replacement. In some departments, some basic level of competence was required, and, for the first time, examinations were held for certain civil-service posts. Nevertheless, the civil service still had a long way to go in its transition from a Shevardnadze-era "clientele" to a rational "Weberian" bureaucracy.

The withdrawal of the "license to be corrupt" from most ordinary officials, including policemen, tax inspectors, and customs officers, allowed for significant increases in the levels of tax collection, which, in turn, permitted

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[26] Keith Darden, "Graft and Governance: Corruption as an Informal Mechanism of State Control," unpublished typoscript (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2002). Also see Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "Corruption: Diagnosis and Treatment," *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 3 (2006): 86-99.

Table 4. Tax Revenues in the Three Caucasian Republics as a Proportion of GDP

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Armenia	13.6	16.1	14.8	14.3	14.6	14.0	14.1	14.3	14.4	16.1
Azerbaijan	13.9	14.2	14.5	14.6	15.1	15.4	15.4	15.2	17.8	21.0
Georgia	10.5	11.5	11.7	12.0	14.4	15.0	18.2	19.8	21.8	24.7

Sources: IMF reports. Armenia: Hamid R. Davoodi and David A. Grigorian, "Tax Potential vs. Tax Effort: A Cross-Country Analysis of Armenia's Stubbornly Low Tax Collection," IMF Working Paper WP/07/106; IMF Country Report No. 07/181 (May 2007); IMF Country Report No. 08/176 (June 2008). Azerbaijan: IMF Country Report No. 03/130 (May 2003); IMF Country Report No. 05/18 (January 2005); IMF Country Report No. 08/216 (July 2008). Georgia: IMF Country Report No. 06/171(May 2006); IMF Country Report No. 07/107 (March 2007); IMF Country Report No. 07/299 (August 2007); International Monetary Fund Resident Representative in Georgia, Table 1. Georgia: Consolidated Budget, 2006-2008, http://www.imf.ge/aattach/ 361.xls. All country reports are available at www.imf.org.
Note: Figures given for Georgia and Azerbaijan refer to the consolidated budget; for Armenia, the state budget.

reasonable basic salaries for civil servants. Table 4 shows how tax collection grew as a proportion of the GDP in the ten years from 1998 to 2007, and indicates an average annual rise of 0.9 percent in the years leading up to the Rose Revolution, compared with 2.4 percent subsequently. This was also associated with significant reductions in the overall level of corruption. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Georgia was the 124th most corrupt country of 133 surveyed in 2003, with a Corruption Perceptions Index of 1.8. By 2007, the country's rating had improved to 79th of 180, with a Corruption Perceptions Index of 3.4.

Nevertheless corruption still persisted at the highest echelons of power, and top officials were brought to account for corruption only if their loyalty to President Mikheil Saakashvili and his team appeared to be in doubt. The most telling case in this respect was that of former defense minister, Irakli Okruashvili, who was arrested for corruption and extortion on September 27, 2007, just two days after he had appeared on television to announce the formation of a new opposition party and to accuse President Saakashvili of plotting to murder business tycoon, Badri Patarkatsishvili. Okruashvili's arrest came just days after the arrest of one of his clients, Mikheil Kareli, the former governor of Shida Kartli province, once again on charges of extortion, just days after he had been involved in a clash with the local police and fired from his position. The point was not whether Okruashvili and Kareli were guilty of extortion; indeed, there was significant evidence that they had been involved in wrongdoing, and Kareli, in particular, had been accused by the public defender and opposition politicians of tolerating smuggling activities from South Ossetia as early as 2004. This incriminating evidence was used against them, however, only when they established themselves as opponents of the incumbent regime.

The Soviet-era practice of using *kompromat* to intimidate and silence defectors was a mechanism used as much after the Rose Revolution as before.

More generally, the basic parameters of the Georgian regime remained more or less the same after the Rose Revolution as before. The presidency remained the principal locus of power and, despite the abolition of the State Chancellery, probably became even more powerful than it was before the Rose Revolution. Even on paper, the powers of the president were boosted; as a result of constitutional amendments passed in February 2004, he now had the right to order the preterm dissolution of parliament—a right that Shevardnadze never had. More importantly, Saakashvili ruled through a network of close confidantes, many of whom had either worked with Saakashvili when he was justice minister or had belonged to the NGO sector during the Shevardnadze period. Among the latter group, former activists from the Liberty Institute and the Open Society—Georgia Foundation (Soros) were prominent. Although these individuals may not have held the key posts within official power structures, they exercised considerable informal power due to their proximity to the president. Similarly, a new "party of power" was established that operated according to very much the same clientelistic principles as the old Citizens' Union of Georgia (see above).

Even in terms of basic procedural democracy, Georgia's progress remained uneven. Although the presidential and parliamentary elections held in 2008 represented an improvement on the "high watermark" of vote falsification observed in the 2000 presidential elections and the parliamentary elections that precipitated the Rose Revolution in November 2003, they were still subject to significant procedural violations, and "administrative resources" were used to benefit the incumbent president and the "party of power." Moreover, the results of these elections were bitterly contested by the opposition, who refused to recognize them. The authorities' impulse to rule by decree in time-honored Soviet style from 2004 to 2008, had widened the gulf between the authorities and opposition and made a democratic pact between the two sides—seen by some scholars[27] as conducive to democratization—virtually inconceivable.

Overall, the formal hierarchical structure of power in Georgia is little changed since the Rose Revolution, as ultimate power rests with the president and those with formal or informal connections to him. Incentives to remain loyal to one's superior have therefore prevailed over incentives to obey formal rules, and informal directives still prevail over formal responsibilities within the state bureaucracy. The president continues to enjoy considerable informal power, which is greater even than the power he possesses on paper, as a statement or telephone call from the president is seen as an order to act.

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[27] Terry Karl and Philippe Schmitter, "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe," *International Social Science Journal* 128 (1991): 269-284.

As before, parliament will pass a law after an informal wink or nod from the president, even on laws it seems incapable of passing under its own initiative alone.[28]

The Georgian example leads us to the conclusion that the unwritten rules of power that prevailed both in Shevardnadze's Georgia and in other hybrid or hybrid-authoritarian states in the Caucasus, and that determine how the state bureaucracy organizes itself, are "sticky," or resistant to change.[29] In this sense, the Rose Revolution was little more than an exercise in "repackaging," in which the faces at the top changed but the rules of the game remained the same. This finding suggests that institutions, namely the informal institutional structure or "organizational culture" of the state apparatus, are remarkably slow to change and prove a major obstacle in transition toward democracy. The "stickiness" of institutions, particularly those that determine how power is distributed and exercised, means that the new leaders in these states do not start with a *tabula rasa*, but have to contend with power relationships that have developed over decades, if not generations. It is this "institutional stickiness" that is central to the explanation of why post-Soviet hybrid regimes remain so resistant to change.

This is not to deny that the hybrid regimes of the Caucasus have evolved over time. We already have seen how the capacity of the Georgian state has increased significantly since the Rose Revolution, and more modest increases in state capacity have been observed in Armenia and Azerbaijan as well. However, greater state capacity has been achieved by increasing the despotic power of the state rather than by exploiting the capacity of society (infrastructural power). The increases in tax collection in Georgia and, to a lesser extent, in Azerbaijan (see table 4) have occurred because economic agents have been forced to hand over their revenues under the threat of sanctions from the state—or rather, the presidency—but there is still no indication that the obligation to pay taxes is becoming a social norm. After Georgia's Rose Revolution, raids were regularly carried out by the tax inspectorate against businesses that were believed to owe tax, but this was done by force rather than through negotiations. None of the three states as yet has the capacity to penetrate and centrally coordinate the activities of civil society through its own infrastructure.

This reflects a fundamental feature of the post-Soviet states in the Caucasus (and, indeed, of other post-Soviet states). Regime stability has been maintained

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[28] A clear example of this was the adoption of a new Law on Local Self-Government, under discussion by parliamentary committees since 2004, but adopted only in 2006 after Saakashvili had made it clear what his preferences were.

[29] Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 6, 37.

by keeping society out. For the new leadership of post-Soviet states, in the 1990s it was barely feasible to govern through establishing institutional links with citizens because such links had not existed during the Soviet period. "Civil society," understood in terms of reciprocity in the flow of information and ideas between society and government, was simply lacking. Building a regime by establishing infrastructural power was therefore not an option. Moreover, the new elites did not see society as a partner but as a potential threat. In part, this was a reflection of the mindset of a Soviet bureaucrat, but more importantly, "society" was associated with the mass uprisings of the late 1980s, or with the militias—or "uncivil society"—of the early 1990s. For the elites of newly independent states, society was to be bribed, threatened, or repressed, but not engaged.

The result was that political elites' reliance on patron-client networks led to the disembedding of the political and economic elites from the rest of society. The primary cleavage within society in the Caucasus (and, more generally, throughout much of the former USSR) was not between different social classes in the way most sociologists have come to understand them, or even between different regions or "clans," but between the tiny fraction of the population that constituted the political and economic elite and the rest of society. This system was stable, but could never be democratic.

Conclusion

Almost two decades after the crumbling of the Soviet empire sent Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan on the bumpy road of political transition, these three states have emerged as rather consolidated hybrid states, albeit one with a strong authoritarian "coloring" in the case of Azerbaijan. While there are considerable differences among the three, all three regimes appear to be locked in limbo—there is no significant movement to worse authoritarianism or to better democratization. Measured by Freedom House Nations in Transit Democracy scores, all changes since 1997 have stayed within a small corridor of about one point.

This essay presented some insights into two related questions: First, what are the origins of the hybrids, and second, why are they so stable? We have described the trajectories of the three countries since 1989 at some length. Tracing the historical process since the collapse of the Soviet Union reveals, above all, that there are different paths to "hybridity."

In Georgia, the challenging nationalist elites were radicalized and highly noncohesive, the opposition strong but internally fragmented, and the new elites challenged by the counter-mobilization of two ethnic minorities. As a consequence, the new regime could not consolidate, and Georgia experienced a series of bitter civil wars. It was a seasoned Soviet power-broker who put bits and pieces together, relying on the power of clientelist networks.

In Armenia, the war for Karabakh acted as an irresistible mobilizing force,

bridged rifts between incumbents and challengers, and assured widespread popular support. But it also placed political power in the hands of a small elite, tightly connected with the army and security forces that used its political influence to severely restrict political competition.

Finally, in Azerbaijan, the power relation between incumbents and challengers favored the former. The national movement was strong enough to challenge incumbents, but it was not strong enough to stay in power and consolidate the regime. The protracted political fight between the communist elite and its national challengers between 1989 and 1993 eroded the institutional base for democratic governance. Eventually, it was Heidar Aliyev, another Soviet power-broker, who took over and built the "system Aliyev," a highly personalized rentier state, which lasts to the present day.

Clearly, in the emergence of hybrids in the Caucasus, equifinality (the principle that similar results may be achieved with different initial conditions and in many different ways) is present. This is often a somewhat frustrating finding for political scientists, who like to find clear associations between causal factors and the observed outcome across many cases. Yet, as we have shown, some of the most prominent factors—ethnic demography, strength of ethnic identity, strength of nationalist mobilization, and direction of nationalist mobilization—are not systematically associated with the outcome. Instead, it was mainly the conflict dynamic in each country among the incumbent (communist) power-holders, the nationalist opposition, and the elites of the autonomous territories, as well as the way these conflicts were played out and the rules by which they were played, that determined the transition path from communism to post-communism.

In terms of the debate as to whether it is primarily actors that determine the dynamics and outcome of political transition[30] or whether, instead, it is cultural, socioeconomic, or institutional preconditions,[31] our argument so far would seem to suggest that both are important. Structural legacies—institutional, organizational, and societal—determined the room for maneuvre within which the leaderships of the newly independent republics were able to operate.

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[30] Karl and Schmitter, "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe," 269-284. Also see Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

[31] Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963). Also see Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," *American Behavioral Scientist* 35, nos. 4-5 (1992): 450-499; Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, expanded edition (New York: Doubleday, 1960); and Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

Many of these structures were holdovers—or reconstructions—from the Soviet period. However, there was still room for political actors to innovate, scheme, and blunder. The disastrous decision made by the communist leadership of Georgia (with the backing of Moscow) in April 1989 to use force against unarmed demonstrators undoubtedly radicalized the population and may have paved the way for the emergence of the demagogic leader Gamsakhurdia and the civil strife with which he was associated, further complicating prospects for a democratic transition. Similarly, the guile with which Shevardnadze and Aliyev were able to bring order to their broken countries helped build the relatively stable regimes that prevailed after 1995. Finally, the personal characteristics of the more "enlightened" Shevardnadze, in contrast with the "autocrat" Aliyev, probably played a key role in making Georgia a "better reformer" than Azerbaijan.

However, if we move up the ladder of generalization, we can at least identify three important "interstations" on the different paths to "hybridity." The first is the fact that new elites in Georgia and Azerbaijan (to a lesser extent in Armenia) were for various idiosyncratic reasons not able to consolidate their regimes between 1989 and 1993. The period between 1988 and 1993 was marked by intense political competition, fought mostly outside institutional avenues. As a consequence, the infrastructural base for governance further eroded. This is in sharp contrast to the Baltic states, where cohesive elites, supported by broad societal consensus, quickly consolidated their regimes and reconstructed state capacities. Second, when in 1993 Caucasian elites started again to rebuild their polities, they had to do so without being able to rely on infrastructural state capacities. The turmoil between 1988 and 1993 had destroyed what little state capacity was left from the Soviet period. Third, this led elites in all three countries to invest in highly institutionalized yet informal networks of patronage, which became the dominant mode of governance. As a result, rent-seeking behavior, corruption, a dominant executive, and a dependent judiciary became endemic.

What then, in the light of our analysis, are the prospects for change? We are tempted to say that they are rather slim. The trend of stagnation that is reflected in the Freedom House scores seems to underline this. We are also tempted to argue that the consolidation of hybrid regimes should not actually be depicted as a sort of "blockade" (which implies that one needs only to remove a few parts and the rest will fall into its democratic place), but rather as an equilibrium outcome: On the one hand, the perpetuation of the patronage system requires that the environment in which the system operates is adapted to ensure the functionality of the patronage system. On the other hand, internal and external constraints require that some aspects of democracy are retained.

As Levitsky and Way argue, liberal hegemony placed a "web of constraints" on nondemocratic governments that seek to maintain international

respectability and viability.[32] Such regimes face some pressure to tolerate a free press, a parliamentary opposition, and an independent judiciary. They also have to accept election monitoring. This all holds true for the Caucasus. In addition, Georgia is dependent on foreign aid and courts Western support in its ambitions to join NATO, while Armenia relies on the generosity of the Armenian Diaspora in the United States, which would not like to see a fully autocratic Armenia. Even Azerbaijan, the most reluctant reformer, is a member of the Council of Europe and would like to eventually integrate more closely into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Furthermore, elites in the Caucasus face some political opposition and, on occasions, an active network of campaigning NGOs that have proven their mobilizing capacity. Fully repressing both might be beyond the capacity of the elites. Besides, there is no need to do so, because the political opposition, while it may be able to block attempts at moves toward full authoritarianism, is in all three countries too weak to threaten the political dominance of the small incumbent elite.

However, at the same time, there are relatively few strong external incentives for the Caucasian elites to become more democratic: the lure of EU accession, which proved to be a highly effective means for promoting democracy in the Baltic and Balkan regions, is not extended to the Caucasus. And Russia, still by far the most important regional player, is not known for its democracy-promotion agenda.

Given these specific internal and external constraints—the need to perpetuate the patronage system, the need to partially placate the demands of the "liberal hegemony," the relative weakness of the opposition, Russia's role and the weakness of the "European option"—the degree of democracy that these hybrids have reached may be at an equilibrium outcome. Since none of these constraints is apt to dramatically change in the near future, there is a high likelihood that the Caucasian states will continue to be hybrid regimes for a long time to come.

[32] Levitsky and Way, "Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," 62.